

# FACTS AND REALITY

ABOUT SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS  
IN GEORGIA





FACTS AND REALITY  
ABOUT SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
AND RIGHTS IN GEORGIA

**Association „HERA XXI”**

APT №2, Building 9, II Block, Gamsakhurdia Ave Tbilisi Georgia

+995 32 14 28 51

**[www.hera-youth.ge](http://www.hera-youth.ge)**

## CONTENTS

### Introduction

Association „Hera XXI” - History, Vision, Goals, Plans .....	5
--	---

### Chapter One

Youth Policy in Georgia.....	6
------------------------------	---

### Chapter Two

Sexual and Reproductive Health Services.....	8
--	---

### Chapter Three

Education for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) .....	12
--	----

### Chapter Four

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Issues and the Media .....	14
---	----

### Chapter Five

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Issues and People - Initiatives for Changes.....	16
---	----

### Chapter Six











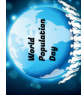

Resources and Platforms of the organization .....	18
---	----












Beneficiaries about HERA-XXI .....	21
------------------------------------	----

Beneficiaries and Partners about HERA-XXI .....	23
---	----

Donors About Us - Interview with the Representatives of the International Family Planning Federation (IPPF) .....	24
--	----

Best Practice and International Experience: Estonia .....	24
--	----

24	იანვარი JANUARY		განათლების საერთაშორისო დღე January International Day of Education
6	თებერვალი FEBRUARY		ქალთა ნივთიერების ნივთიერების ბრძოლის საერთაშორისო დღე International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation
1	მარტი MARCH		ნულოვანი დისკრიმინაციის დღე Zero Discrimination Day
8	მარტი MARCH		ქალთა საერთაშორისო დღე International Women's Day
21	მარტი MARCH		დაუნის სინდრომის საერთაშორისო დღე World Down Syndrome Day
7	აპრილი APRIL		ჯანმრთელობის მსოფლიო დღე World Health Day
15	მაისი MAY		ოჯახის საერთაშორისო დღე World Health Day
17	მაისი MAY		ჰომოფობიასთან და ტრანსფობიასთან ბრძოლის საერთაშორისო დღე International Day Against Homophobia
28	მაისი MAY		ქალთა ჯანმრთელობის სერვისებზე ხელმძღვანელობის საერთაშორისო დღე International Day of action for Women's health
1	ივნისი JUNE		ბავშვთა დაცვის საერთაშორისო დღე International Day for Protection of Children
11	ივლისი JULY		მოსახლეობის მსოფლიო დღე World Population Day
10	დეკემბერი DECEMBER		ადამიანის უფლებათა დაცვის საერთაშორისო დღე Human Rights Day

15	ივლისი JULY		მსოფლიო ახალგაზრდების უნარიების დღე World Youth Skill Day
12	აგვისტო AUGUST		ახალგაზრდების საერთაშორისო დღე International Youth Day
26	სექტემბერი SEPTEMBER		მსოფლიო კონტრაცეფციის დღე World Contraception Day
28	სექტემბერი SEPTEMBER		უსაფრთხო აბორტის ხელმძღვანელობის საერთაშორისო დღე International Safe Abortion Day
5	ოქტომბერი OCTOBER		მასწავლებელთა მსოფლიო დღე World Teacher's Day
10	ოქტომბერი OCTOBER		მენტალური ჯანმრთელობის მსოფლიო დღე World Mental Health Day
11	ოქტომბერი OCTOBER		გოგონათა საერთაშორისო დღე Girls International Day
25	ნოემბერი NOVEMBER		ქალთა მიმართ ძალადობის აღკვეთის საერთაშორისო დღე International Day of Elimination of the Violence
1	დეკემბერი DECEMBER		მოდსთან ბრძოლის მსოფლიო დღე World AIDS Day
3	დეკემბერი DECEMBER		შეზღუდული შესაძლებლობები მქონე პირთა საერთაშორისო დღე International Day of People with Disabilities
5	დეკემბერი DECEMBER		მოხალისეთა საერთაშორისო დღე International Volunteer Day

## INTRODUCTION: ASSOCIATION „HERA XXI” - HISTORY, VISION, GOALS, PLANS

*The history of the Association „Hera XXI” starts from the 1990s. As a result of many years of active work, we have created a space where women can safely and securely access information about sexual and reproductive health and rights. In addition, the target audience of the Association is the youth, who are offered comprehensive, age-appropriate, accurate information and the services provided for them by the Association are both friendly and non-discriminatory. But the effort, no matter how large, of a single organization is not enough for achieving the above mentioned; therefore, through advocacy, we work with relevant government agencies, use different international advocacy platforms and ways to enhance and improve the existing environment for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Georgia. All this is the basis for gender equality, which remains nowadays as one of the topical issues in our country.*

*The situation in Georgia has changed dramatically since the 1990s, but we still face some challenges, including many stigmas and stereotypes about sexual and reproductive health.*

*Lack of information still prevails. Many women lack information about their rights and available services. In addition, reproductive rights are not yet considered an integral part of human rights in the country. On top of all this reproductive health services are less accessible, have quality gaps and are associated with certain barriers. The development of an organizational model of Primary Health Care system and integration of Sexual and Reproductive Health services into practice is not supported for health promotion, disease prevention and continuous of care.*

*Unfortunately, these are the issues that are either ignored or not sufficiently considered by our society. As a result, there are gender barriers, violence against women and domestic violence, child marriages among girls, poor quality of medical care which fails to address the gender-specific problems and needs of patients, and biased counselling by some medical staff frequently incite stress and fear among women. All the above mentioned limit the realization of health rights in our country.*

*We should be aware that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) fully cover issues such as: universal access to high quality services, information and education. Investing in this area is necessary, essential and beneficial, as this can reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and number of abortion. It allows for family planning, which reduces complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, helps women maintain the best interval between pregnancies, and stay health and reduces the risk of further complications. It also reduces maternal and child morbidity and mortality rates. The SRHR issues form the foundation for gender equality and help raise awareness among women and pave the way for their self-realization in all aspects of life.*

*By promoting and enhancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, the Association HERA XXI contributes to the achievement of UN goals of sustainable development, in particular ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Goal 3) and achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5).*

*Our joint effort should be directed towards improving the reproductive health of women and girls, guaranteeing their physical, social and psychological well-being*



**Nino Tsuleiskiri**

*Director  
of the Association „HERA XXI”*

## Chapter One:

# YOUTH POLICY IN GEORGIA

One of the most important strategic directions of the Association HERA XXI is to promote healthy lifestyle and reproductive health among the youth.

Consequently, the work of the Association is largely focused on young people. Through educating young people and raising their awareness of relevant issues, the Organization promotes the development of values such as autonomy, individualism, informed choice etc., among young people. In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, it is necessary to have an effective youth policy in the country.

„The Association is actively involved in the process of youth policy development in the country. „HERA XXI” participated in the development of the Youth Policy Document in 2014. As a result of our successful advocacy, the Youth Policy Document incorporates the issues related to sexual and reproductive rights and health issues. Since 2019 the Organization has been a member of the State Youth Policy Monitoring and Development Working Group. The Association is actively working on initiatives tailored to the needs of young people as well as on raising awareness of reproductive health or healthy lifestyle among young people, so that young people can live in a stigma-free, friendly environment”.



**Salome Iobadze**

*Project Coordinator Association  
„HERA XXI”*





**„YOUTH POLICY IS BEING DEVELOPED WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE“**

**Irina Pruidze**

*Member of the Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs*

The existence of youth policy is essential to increase the role of young people in the socio-political life of the state.

In order to achieve the effectiveness of youth policy in the country, the active participation of the State itself in the process is essential. To this end, the State set up an agency working on the issues related to the development and implementation of youth policy in 2019.

What are the main objectives of the Agency? What issues are considered relevant to the Agency and what are the future plans of the Agency? - Irina Pruidze, a member of the Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs, talks about these and other related issues in details.

„We cannot talk about ensuring SRHR in the country unless we involve young people in this process, because it is primarily about them. Their awareness, their education and their involvement in the decision making process is very important. When we talk about youth policy, we focus on the engagement of young people.

Currently, not everything is as we want it to be. Engagement is not limited to the raised awareness. Awareness is one of the small parts of engagement, but it is not enough. It is imperative to equip young people with the skills and competencies needed for their engagement, for them to be able to participate in decision-making processes. In this regard, we still face serious challenges, especially at the local level.

There are some very strong youth organizations at the central level, which work with different institutions, including state institutions, and

which engage in dialogues with different institutions. The former Ministry of Sports and Youth of Georgia introduces a certain framework for working with youth organizations. The current youth policy and the relevant action plan, which was approved by the government in 2015, and which sets out the course of actions by the year 2030, was developed with the support from and the involvement of youth organizations. This was an example of good practice of the government and the civil society working together, but the same was not observed at the local level.

Certainly, information campaigns are of high priority, because without awareness, it is impossible to talk about SRHR or gender equality. We are aware of stereotypes being highly obstructive in this regard and they cannot be overcome without information campaigns and awareness raising efforts, in which young people have crucial role to play.

One of the priorities of the 2015-2020 Action Plan was to raise awareness of among young people about reproductive health and prevention services, which remains largely unfulfilled. As for sexual education, education of teachers and medical staff concerning the issues related to sexual and reproductive rights is an ongoing process. However, we do not have precise information on how many educational events were held and how they were held. One of the most important problems we face today is the lack of an action plan monitoring scheme.

I think that sexual education is important not only for the implementation of gender equality standards, but for personal development, in general, for our children to become full-fledged and healthy citizens. It is important to equip our children with the opportunity to gradually gain age-specific sexuality-related knowledge. Even primary school children can have access to this kind of education; because the more accurate and timely is the sexuality-related information children receive, the more healthy their attitudes will be“. - Irina Pruidze, Member of the Committee on Sports and Youth Affairs

# SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Territorial accessibility to and financial availability of sexual and reproductive health services is one of the key strategic priority areas of the Association „HERA XXI“. This is particularly important for socially or otherwise vulnerable population and young people, women and girls living in rural areas, IDPs. As part of its strategy, the Organization works to create and develop high-quality, patient-centred, stigma-free and discrimination-free services.

*Family planning is one of the basic human rights and an essential part of human life. Sexual and reproductive health and rights help us in the process, providing us with the knowledge and skills we need, and making medical services both accessible and available. What is the state doing to protect and realize sexual and reproductive health and rights? How effective are relevant programmes, and are relevant services available? Is the review of controversial pieces of the applicable health legislation planned? What actions are planned for raising awareness of SRHR? Akaki Zoidze, Chair of Health Care and Social Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, speaks about these and other related issues in details.*



„The State has an obligation to protect human rights in the field of reproduction. Therefore, the government is implementing programmes envisaging antenatal and postnatal care for expectant mothers. The state also provides co-financing or free services with regard to preconception health and care and family planning. The State has the National Maternal and New-born Health Strategy for 2017-2030, which we are currently implementing. According to the document, we need to increase access to modern methods of contraception, that is, the

State Budget should be allocated to finance this family planning service. The initiative is planned to be implemented by 2021. In the first stage, due to limited financial resources, free contraceptive services will be provided only to the vulnerable population. However, this change, like many others, is linked to political will. A part of our society believes that financing modern methods of contraception means promoting contraception, which, they believe, will have a negative effect on our society.

As for the safe abortion service, its funding by the State is a highly problematic issue. I am not against the funding, I just believe it cannot be implemented yet. Much effort is needed to overcome the resistance displayed by anti-abortion supporters. Our committee has to struggle to resist legislative proposals concerning near-total ban on abortions. Unfortunately, our society remains largely conservative and there is a misperception that it is possible to eliminate the problem of abortion by banning it. I can assure you that as long as I am the chair of the committee, we will strongly oppose the attempts to pass such a law.

I share the view that access to safe abortion services is a women's right, but the issue of funding this service is a highly political one.

The five-day waiting period is often regarded as one of the barriers to safe abortion services. Personally, I do not see anything wrong with it. Women or couples can change their mind during this period. I understand that a geographic barrier can be the problem many patients have to face. However, I find it less problematic if it can result in a decision not to have abortion.

Physicians should adhere to the code of ethics and standards of practice at all times when they speak to their patients in the process of providing the service. Otherwise, the physician will be blamed for violations of the rules of medical ethics and will be held legally accountable.

It is important to integrate SRHR services in the services delivered by the primary healthcare. Family planning services are already funded exclusively within the primary healthcare, in educational settings, but contraception is not yet

funded. This is a „gap”, and unfortunately, other types of programmes are not funded yet.

Women should receive three major components - information, education and counselling - through the primary healthcare. The idea behind a family doctor is to a doctor being able to provide any member of a family with age-appropriate counselling. Today the focus is on other issues, but we would like to change the situation. Primary healthcare reform is needed, in particular, training for family doctors will start soon and will continue throughout the next year. Doctors will be trained in 5 chronic diseases as well as in maternal and child health and SRHR.

Besides the efforts to improve services, there is a need to raise public awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Unfortunately, school curricula do not include lessons on SRHR issues, and the situation needs to be changed; our committee plans to initiate introduction of SRHR education in schools. In fact, children should have the opportunity to attend SRHR lessons, where they can learn about sexual life, family planning, in general, and SRHR, including abortion. First of all, we desire to introduce specific lessons. As a legislator, I have been actively campaigning for the above mentioned, we have had numerous meetings on demographic policy, in general, and one of the topics during these meetings has always been sexual education. However, it should be noted that our initiatives have frequently been countered by a certain part of our society”.  
- Akaki Zoidze, Chair of Health Care and Social Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia.

*Patients and physicians first come into contact with the organized medical structure at the primary healthcare level. Consequently, the role of the family doctor is important. In order to ensure access to reproductive health services, including family planning services, it is necessary to integrate these services in the services delivered at the primary health care level.*

*The first information about the issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) should usually be obtained from family doctors. For this purpose, family doctors need relevant competences and thorough knowledge of the issue.*



**„HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURE PER CAPITA IN GEORGIA IS \$ 120, WHEREAS HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURE PER CAPITA IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES IS € 96 000”**

**Vera Baziari** *Strengthening primary health care is a priority in the national strategies of the state. What is in fact being done with SRHR issues such as the professional development of family doctors? How these services are provided to women at the primary health care level? Vera Baziari, Deputy Minister of Health, a member of the Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, speaks about these and other related issues in details.*

„Financing prenatal care within the primary healthcare remained a problem for a very long time, with the State only allocating GEL 50 per pregnant woman, which was a scarce benefit. So, for a long time, Georgia failed to meet international standards. It was not until two years ago that the State started covering the costs of prenatal visits; the cost of 8 visits totals GEL 180 which falls heavily on users in a country with the economy like ours.

The professionalism of doctors is as important as financing prenatal care. In the primary healthcare settings, the doctor should manage the condition of and prepare pregnant patients, but some doctors may even lack the skills necessary for helping women make right decisions. No significant cost is involved in resolving this issue, the key is to provide accurate information. Doctors should have the ability and skills necessary for encouraging patients and building trust which can help the doctor and the patient to make right decisions together. In the near future, we will start assessing doctors' knowledge and retraining programmes for doctors. We have to find out what equipment, technical and material

bases they use while providing services to patients.

Medical surveillance needs to be improved and standardization is required. I have been working at the Ministry of Health for 22 years, and I have witnessed various reforms and programmes implemented during this period, some of them with international support. For years, we have spared no effort to bring this field closer to international standards.

Modern methods of contraception should be prioritized by the State. When young people start using contraceptives, it is important for them to be aware of exactly how they should be used as well as of their side effects. We chose a wrong policy, and we made a big mistake right from the start when we imported lots of means of contraception and made them available to everyone. A prudent strategy needs to be developed to prevent any harm to both the State and the consumers. To this end, information needs to be updated, and the consumer readiness should be assessed. Our market offers a great choice of means of contraception and the prices are not too high. It will be wrong to spontaneously decide to make contraception available to everyone unless we study the minimum proportion of consumers.

Free contraception should be made available only after the Ministry of Health studies the demand and the percentage of the vulnerable population among the consumers.

In general, healthcare has become affordable for everyone in Georgia, but one issue remains to be resolved: doctors have a little time for providing counselling service. Therefore, young people, both girls and boys, need to know about reproductive health from an early age. At the same time, there should be people who can provide appropriate answers to all the questions young people have about their reproductive health. Nowadays, the level of awareness of pregnant women is low. More and more women are requesting caesarean section, about 70-80% of them; especially young girls who prefer to be operated on just because they do not want to experience childbirth pain.

Recent studies show that the number of abortions is decreasing; however, abortion still remains as one of the main methods of family planning, which is not good, of course. Abortion, whether

through medication or surgery, is unacceptable and undesirable. It is better for young people to know how to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies. The mistakes young people make in this regard are the result of insufficient and inappropriate education.

Another important problem is the scarcity of financial resources, which causes many of the problems that exist in Georgia today. Health

care expenditure per capita in Georgia is \$ 120, whereas health care expenditure per capita in the Nordic countries is € 96 000. We want better conditions, but with scarce resources available. We have to work hard because, unfortunately, we do not belong to the group of rich countries”.

- Vera Baziari, Deputy Minister of Health, a member of the Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.



# EDUCATION FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR)

The strategic direction of the Association is to promote formal and informal education on sexual and reproductive health and rights and on healthy lifestyle. In this regard the target groups of the Association are: young people, including students, young people living in rural areas, IDPs, vulnerable young people, parents, teachers, and school doctors.

The Association „HERA XXI” supports the creation of a favourable environment for reproductive health and healthy lifestyle. To this end, the Association collaborates with state agencies on the provision of reproductive health education, and, in addition, it implements programmes in non-formal education settings. The approach of the association is complex, as it works with different groups, for providing a favourable environment.

For the purpose of raising awareness of reproductive health and promoting a healthy lifestyle, a non-formal education guide „Everything in One Course” was adapted within the framework of non-formal education. The Guide provides relevant, qualified and comprehensive information on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Association has developed an on-line learning resource, [www.ehera.ge](http://www.ehera.ge), which offers free, accredited courses on the issues of sexual and reproductive health.

Every child and adult has the right to education on reproductive health and a healthy lifestyle, appropriate to their age. Everyone should be given the opportunity to make informed choices that will make their lives better and contribute to building a fair society. In this process, the role of teachers is crucial.



Incorporation of the education for Reproductive Health and Healthy Lifestyle in schools is a means of prevention of sexual abuse, child marriages and teenage pregnancy” -

**Salome Iobadze**

*Project Coordinator Association  
„HERA XXI”*



## **„CONTINUOUS MEDICAL EDUCATION (CME) WILL BE COMPULSORY FOR ALL PHYSICIANS PRACTICING IN GEORGIA”**

**Zaza Bokhua**

*Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health*

„Continuous medical education (CME) had been compulsory for all physicians before 2007; since 2007 it has been optional, however, there are necessary and urgent trainings which are compulsory for doctors, which include trainings focused on reproductive health, which has always been one of the priority areas.

Education on reproductive health is no less important. In this case, the main task is to provide the population with information in a language that is understandable for them. The education process should be continuous now as well as in the future and it has never been a contentious issue. Instead, education has always been thought of as a means of maintaining family integrity; as a means for young people to avoid reproductive health problems and sexually transmitted diseases. Information about sexual life means acquiring knowledge on various diseases, and so it is vital. However, the format of this information should take into account the demands of the population and the level at which we are today.

We can never and will never ban abortion, including abortion through medication, rather, our aim is to prevent abortion and reduce the need for it. This is the purpose of information about reproductive health.

Awareness of the issues related to SRHR is crucial among young people, as the level of their education is what determines the future of the country. The main task is to reduce the rate of abortions through educating young people and informing them about the family planning methods and contraception. Women in Georgia mainly seek induced abortion either at an early age or after the first childbirth.

Owing to education now contraception is used as a means of family planning. If a couple want to have a child, they plan everything beforehand and are well-prepared for a childbirth and if they do not, they seek contraception. Thus we minimize all the complications which may adversely affect the woman, her health, her social and psychological well-being.

Initially, first aid should be taught at school and school nurses and doctors should be trained. It is also important to train teachers for them to be able to properly inform their students. Changes need to be made step by step, first, the population and the school staff should be trained. There is a separate syllabus for adolescents, we have to be very careful with them, so the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, UNFPA are involved in this process. We have everything planned in details and we are going to implement our plan step by step. Our goal is to reduce the rate of abortions, especially among teenagers, as this is dangerous and may lead to infertility in the future. In addition, abortion is a serious psychological and social stress”. - Zaza Bokhua.

# SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS ISSUES AND THE MEDIA

In Georgia today, social issues and especially sexual and reproductive health and rights issues are not a high priority in the media. Even when these issues are covered, there often reports or stories containing stereotypical, biased and discriminatory elements, which violate human rights. How does the Georgian media cover sexual and reproductive health issues? What media standards exist and are they violated? How is journalistic activity „controlled“? In what ways is the media/a journalist accountable for a mistake made? What is the role of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics? Does the Georgian media consider their recommendations and comments? Nana Biganishvili, Chair of the Council of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics speaks about these and other related issues in details.



**„THE GEORGIAN  
MEDIA DOES NOT  
CONSISTENTLY  
COVER GENDER AND  
REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES“**

**Nana Biganishvili**

*Chair of the Council of  
the Charter of Journalistic  
Ethics*

To begin with, I would like to briefly tell you about the Charter of Journalistic Ethics and the purpose it serves. A decade ago, we - the journalists living and working in Georgia - gathered and agreed to establish our own self-regulatory organization. Our purpose is not to punish or control anyone, but about to give advice, recommendations and to work together to improve the quality of journalistic work in the Georgian media. Giving recommendations is the only tool of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics.

Once a case is examined, we publish our findings and decisions and make them publicly available. I think, that a detailed description of the process of how we came to a decision will then be helpful to a journalist working on a particular topic and will help him/her to become more qualified, find more impartial experts and consider more ideas while preparing a coverage. Our recommendations



are always taken into account by ethical and professional media outlets, but there are some which continue to work the way they did, regardless of our comments or recommendations.

As for the issues related to gender and reproductive health, I should admit that the Georgian media does not consistently cover these topics. Unfortunately, plenty of media outlets are trying to show the scandalous aspects of the issue to boost their program's rankings. Such an approach is detrimental because society fails to receive accurate, balanced and human rights-based information.

For the most part, when a journalist makes a mistake or misuses a term, it is due to a lack of either information or time. There are, of course, cases of deliberate distortion of information, but in my opinion, in majority of cases, this is caused by a lack of information. Our involvement in such cases is important. We conduct workshops for journalists throughout the year, and we also have a group of journalists who are at the same time signatories to the Charter. We often conduct surveys in this group to determine what topics are of interest.

I think there is a need for more training on topics such as gender and SRHR. It is also our role to raise the level of awareness among journalists. Believe me, when a journalist has some information, he/she will definitely use it to improve his material. Everyone is always trying to be better and grow professionally.

In general, working on medical issues has always been the most difficult. I have worked as a journalist since 2002, and I can say that healthcare has always been, and still is, one of the most difficult areas for journalists, due to its multi-component nature, on the one hand, and the difficulty of finding an independent expert, on the other hand.

Since I joined the Council of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics, we have had few cases related to SRHR issues. We have never had the case like that of the Association „HERA XXI“. There was a single case involving a violation of the respondent anonymity: a person with HIV was recorded in such a way that his identity could be identified. Although the journalist had attempted to protect respondent anonymity, he had not taken sufficient measures and the respondents could still be identified“. - Nana Biganishvili

# SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS ISSUES AND PEOPLE - INITIATIVES FOR CHANGES



„Women's Health within the Healthcare System of Georgia" is the name of the virtual space dedicated only to women. Women, either openly or anonymously, can share their mental, psychological, sexual and reproductive or other types of health problems". -

**Ani Robakidze**

*Founder of the Group*

„The purpose of setting up this closed group on a social network was not to compile thousands of stories, but rather to provide assistance to women through pieces of advice and recommendations given to them by specialists, or through sharing personal experiences.

This Facebook group has been there for less than a year and it already has about 20,000 members. What are the most common issues discussed here? What kind of advice do women receive, in general? What has helped to make „Women's Health within the Healthcare System of Georgia" an integral part of its members' lives? Ani Robakidze, one of the founders and administrators of the group, speaks about these and other related issues in details.

There are many stereotypes related to sexual and reproductive health in Georgia; that is why the questions are hardly ever asked out loud. We wanted to set up a space where women could have an access to information. In this respect, our task was to make any information completely anonymous.

We had the idea of setting up the group about 8 months ago, last year. Initially, there were two of us - two girls who managed the group, but then with the increase of the number of group members, it became necessary to add more administrators. We now have 5 administrators of the group. However, it is still very difficult to deal with everything, and besides all the work is done on a volunteer basis.

We had never seen such a group before. As soon as we set up the group, presumably, many people immediately felt the need of setting up groups

dedicated to different topics concerning women and they set up such groups.

We are the only group operating in the field of health, but there are various thematic groups, dedicated to the topics such as sexual education, self-care, etc.

Based on my personal observation, some of the issues that many women are concerned about are: mental health, gynaecology, reproduction; some other topical issues include: unprotected sex, and a lack of information on risks or possible effects. Women do not have any information about so called «after day» pills and they take them like vitamins, and they do not know that these pills should not be taken on a daily basis.

We provide members of the group with the information on State-financed services as well. There are several government programmes that are free for women, but majority of women are less-informed about these programmes. Therefore, we compiled a list of free services and made it available for the members of the group. For example, one of the services is the consultation with a gynaecologist, a short-term projects of some NGOs. However, financial barriers still remain the number one problem. And one of the main reasons for setting up this group was to share information with one another in times of financial difficulties”. - Ani Robakidze, Founder of the Group.

# RESOURCES AND PLATFORMS OF THE ORGANIZATION

A visit to a gynaecologist in Georgia is often associated with high costs, time, and stress. A free online confidential counselling with an experienced reproductive health specialist, created by the Association „HERA XXI”, is a space where questions about sexual and reproductive health can be answered quickly, competently and anonymously. This service is especially important for young people because they often do not have the information they need and therefore may get their personal experience in stressful situations. Access to similar services is also important for women living in rural areas, who have difficulty accessing a service provided by gynaecologists due to geographical barriers. The service which offers access to information covers socially vulnerable groups of population as well. It should be noted that online counselling does not replace the need for a visit to a gynaecologist. It is a source of information, trusted advice and timely referrals.

- Online counselling with an experienced reproductive health specialist - on the initiative of the Association „HERA XXI”, free reproductive health services for women have been set up in Georgia, which include online counselling with a reproductive health specialist/gynaecologist. The service implies providing answers to questions related to the following topics: modern methods of contraception, family planning, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and their prevention, sexual behaviour, etc. The service is completely free and confidential and is provided by an experienced reproductive health specialist. To receive the service, please visit the website of the Organization ([www.hera-youth.ge](http://www.hera-youth.ge)) and open the chat window on the right hand side.

Continuous Medical Education (CME) is not fully implemented in Georgia. Certain certification courses or trainings are frequently associated with high financial burden. The online learning platform set up by the Association offers free access to medical professionals or just interested individuals.

The e-learning website of the Association „HERA XXI” - [www.ehera.ge](http://www.ehera.ge) - is an online space offering sexual and reproductive health education. For

the first time, school doctors, family doctors, teachers, non-formal education workers and young people are provided with the opportunity to receive web-based distance continuing education on the issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, so that everyone has access to the knowledge necessary for the healthy development of adolescents and young people. The programme is free, is developed by experts, is accredited and awards certificates.

### Training Programmes:

- The programme is free, is developed by experts, is accredited and awards certificates.
- Online training course for school doctors - „Reproductive Development and Health of Adolescents“;
- A short course of distance learning for family doctors - „Managing Common Reproductive Health Problems within the Frames of General Medical Practice“;
- E-learning course for teachers, non-formal education workers and young people - „Everything in One Course“;

On the initiative of the Association „HERA XXI“, two innovative online resources have been introduced in Georgia; the resources are designed for teachers and parents to enable them to fully engage in conversations with young people about the issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Comprehensive sexual education has not been implemented in Georgia yet. Therefore, the two main sources which provide adolescents with information and knowledge about sexual behaviour, different changes in their bodies during puberty, contraception, or other topics, are the family and teachers

- **www.forteachers.ge** is a website set up by the Association „HERA XXI“, which incorporates a wide range of supportive resources for implementing effective approaches in the course of teaching issues related to reproductive health and healthy lifestyles, and which are designed for teachers of biology, civics, and class tutors. Adolescents can also find the information on this website useful, but the web-

site is intended for teachers and provides them with comprehensive information on students' growth and development, as well as helpful tips for communicating with children of different ages, providing information on possible problems (medical, psychological, behavioural, etc.) as well solutions to these problems. Age-specific ready-made lesson plans, thematic materials, tools, and visual material - this is a list of resources the website offers to interested teachers to help them to provide students with reliable, accurate and competent information. Any material on the website is tailored to the level of psycho-sexual development of children and adolescents. In addition, there is a mobile app for both android and iOS users.

- **www.forparents.ge** is a website set up by the Association „HERA XXI“, which incorporates a wide range of supportive resources for parents to help them communicate with their children on the issues related to reproductive health and healthy lifestyles. Any material on the website is age-specific and tailored to the level of psycho-sexual development of children. This unique and unprecedented resource in Georgia is designed to enable parents to provide their child with a calm, trustworthy, and friendly environment and to provide answers to the questions asked by their children concerning different changes in their bodies during puberty, reproductive health, healthy relationships and more. In addition, there is a mobile app for both android and iOS users.

***Issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights are covered incompletely, inappropriately and in a biased manner in the Georgian media. „Alternative View“ is a series of the program created by the Association „HERA XXI“, which is a source of comprehensive and adequate information on issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights.***

„Alternative View“ – the Association has been broadcasting the series of TV program „Alternative View“ for years; the program covers important topics such as: safe abortion services, reproductive health services, family planning,

youth-friendly services, modern methods of contraception, sexually transmitted infections and their prevention, SRHR as a basis for gender equality, etc. The program is broadcast by regional TV channels and through social media, ensuring

access to important information for the entire Georgian population, including people living in rural areas. The series are based on scientifically proven accurate data and the opinions expressed by experts in the field.

## ASSOCIATION HERA XXI

offers free services and platforms:



Free legal consultation with lawyer on issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights



Free online consultation with doctor-reproductologist



TV show series **Alternative Opinion** – spots about issues of gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education and etc.



**www.ehera.ge** – online learning platform for doctors, teachers and persons interested in sexual and reproductive health and rights



**www.forteachers.ge** – online platform for teachers designed to help them in communicating with students about reproductive health, sexual behavior, social relations and etc.



Mobile version of the platform is available for both IOS and Android users



**www.fortparents.ge** – online platform for parents designed to help them in communicating with children about reproductive health, sexual behavior, social relations and etc.



Mobile version of the platform is available for both IOS and Android users



## BENEFICIARIES ABOUT

[www.forparents.ge](http://www.forparents.ge)  
and [www.forteachers.ge](http://www.forteachers.ge)

*„At the age when, according to the biology curriculum, children should be informed about reproductive function, they have display light-hearted and frisky attitudes to these topics.”*

### **Biologist, Teacher of Biology**

„I am a biologist and I have been teaching biology for 9 years now. Definitely, because of my specialty, I have a good knowledge of human biology and physiology, but teaching a lesson on reproductive functions is always anything but easy. There are many reasons for this, including so many negative stereotypes in the society about human sexuality, reproductive health and gender identity.

In fact, reproductive health is always important to humans throughout their life cycle. Adolescents should start learning about these issues at an early age. And the two main institutions responsible for providing adolescents with this information should be the school and family. Personally, I openly talk with my child about sexual and reproductive health, but it has always been difficult for me to do the same with my students

at school. Our country's system of education hardly incorporates any of the components of comprehensive sexual education. At the age when, according to the biology curriculum, children should be informed about reproductive function, they have display light-hearted and frisky attitudes to these topics.

Over time, my pedagogical skills have improved and I am no longer afraid of the novelties. I realized that it is important to provide my students with comprehensive information about these topics. It was after I made that decision that I started looking for additional resources and I came across the website for teachers created by the Association „HERA XXI”. I have to admit that this instrument made it easier for me to work in this direction, because there are ready-made topics, plans there and any teacher can benefit from using these resources. We very often do not have time to think for ourselves and create right approaches, and the website for teachers makes this process easier and more convenient. I mostly use the material for class tutors. I have been using the website for several months now and I have already noticed that something has changed in my students' attitudes as well. The website has helped me create a safe and friendly environment for them. Students feel confident enough to ask me questions that concern them.“  
– A biologist.

*„I had no idea how to talk to her about the changes in her body during puberty, about the difficulties that adolescents face at this age, and about her views on all this. I often wanted to start a conversation, though every time I felt embarrassed“.*

### **Nia, parent**

„I am Nia, 34. I have a 13-year-old daughter. Her name is Tako. I always try to have friendly, open and healthy relations with my daughter. However, talking about some issues proves to be not so easy.

Last year, I noticed that my daughter had become emotionally more distant and disconnected from me than she used to be before. I blamed it on the age of puberty, but I had no idea how to talk to her about the changes in her body during puberty, about the difficulties that adolescents face at this age, and about her views on all this. I often wanted to start a conversation, though every time I felt embarrassed.

I soon realized that I had to talk to my daughter, that it was necessary. Otherwise, she could get information from unreliable sources. That was when I discovered the website for parents created by the Association „HERA XXI“. I have to admit that this is a single instrument that helps parents to create the environment where our children can talk freely about changes in their bodies and about sexual health. Unfortunately, I do not speak English, and there are no articles or other forums or blogs on these topics in the Georgian language.

The website for parents is practical and informative. The topics on the list cover all the issues that are important to both parents and their teenage children. The first topic I got acquainted was the menstrual cycle. After getting the information, I was able to talk comfortably with my daughter.

Now I am reading the information about sexual maturity on the website. I want to know as much as possible to be able to answer all the

questions my daughter might have and I also want her to feel that I, as a mother, can answer her questions. This is very important because nowadays adolescents can access information on everything online, but no one checks its quality and reliability.

In addition, I have just read a guide for parents designed by the Association, and it should be mentioned that besides informative texts, the guide contains some tips and tools that have helped me to find the right ways to communicate with my daughter.

Issues related to Sexual and reproductive health are tabooed in our society. While these topics are relevant to people of all ages, almost no one talks about them, at least aloud. It might have been because of these stereotypes in our society that had made me avoid talking about them with my daughter.

I used to see no need for sexual education in schools, moreover, for a long time, I used to think that it would have brought more harm than benefit. Now I realize that comprehensive sexual education, which is age-specific and tailored to the developmental needs of adolescents, is simply necessary. Education can be of preventive nature, and access to information can save young people from experiencing too many stressful situations, such as unplanned pregnancies, spontaneous sexual intercourse and associated risks.

As long as sexual education is not taught in schools, talking to a teenager about these topics is entirely the responsibility of his/her parents. This is bad because it happens very often that children are unable to ask their parents questions or we, parents, are unable to answer their questions. The website for parents is an invaluable resource for a number of reasons: it has no Georgian analogue, and many people do not speak any other foreign language to access information. In addition, everything starting from topics to tips and tactics is given in a single space. Also, I recently discovered that the website has a mobile app, which makes it even more convenient to use it.



**Nino Kasrashvili** - Director of the Family Medicine Centre for IDPs „Bichvinta“:

*„We have been cooperating with the Association „HERA XXI“ for years. It is within this cooperation that the number and quality of medical services, in particular, in terms of reproductive and sexual health, have been significantly expanded and increased. Until recently, most women had no idea about family planning services and modern methods of contraception. As a result, there were many cases of unwanted/unintended pregnancies and consequent cases of abortion.*

*Since we started cooperation with the Association „HERA XXI“, the number of referrals (to the doctors employed by our Medical Centre - an obstetrician-gynaecologist, a family doctor) seeking counselling on methods of contraception has increased. No one can disagree that giving women or couples qualified advice on issues concerning contraception is an essential part of family planning. It helps the couple to properly evaluate their reproductive abilities, to choose the method of contraception they will be satisfied with, and to use the chosen method correctly and safely. That is why the demand for safe abortion services has also decreased.*

*Activities carried out and services provided by the Association „HERA XXI“ change the lives of women and families, in general, for the better.“*

Kvemo Kartli regional authority representative:

*The activities carried out by the Association „HERA XXI“ in local self-government are especially important for public officials who, through their activities, are in direct contact with local women and girls. In terms of access to information, there are many problems in Kvemo Kartli municipalities, as well as in other regions throughout Georgia. The activities carried out by the Association „HERA XXI“ - meetings and workshops - help us raise awareness of the issues related to sexual and reproductive health and of the principles of gender equality. In addition, the Association conducted a needs assessment survey, which resulted in a better understanding of the needs of local municipalities.*

*The work, support and involvement of non-governmental organizations, including the Association „HERA XXI“, are essential to enabling local authorities to integrate SRHR issues into local plans and strategies. The legislative and political framework is vital for any further actions“.*

**Khatia Tabukashvili** - Social Worker:

*„Social workers have to work with people with various problems, including with socially or otherwise vulnerable people and people with specific needs. The issues of reproductive health and rights are very often problematic for these people. They frequently need help and competent advice from a social worker. That is why training for social workers is so important, as they have direct contact with beneficiaries, whose reproductive health and rights remain problematic. The Association „HERA XXI“ organizes trainings for social workers on a regular basis. It is owing to such training programs that SRHR information and related services are made available to the most vulnerable groups of the population“.*

## DONORS ABOUT US - INTERVIEW WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING FEDERATION (IPPF)



„The IPPF protects the rights of every person, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or ethnic origin. In order for people to make competent and informed decisions about their body and health, the sexual and reproductive rights of individuals must be protected. NGOs, including „HERA XXI”, play an important role in this regard. This organization works on the basis of research and scientific evidence, is constantly voicing critical views and is continuously involved in advocacy, preparing reports and empowering young people.

The IPPF's work relies on the work of local NGOs who are think tanks in specific local contexts. Working with such organizations is the only way to bring about rapid and effective changes at the local level.

The Association „HERA XXI” is a long-standing partner of the IPPF through which we can operate in Georgia. Its work extends on the whole population of Georgia and focuses on underprivileged and marginalized groups such as people living below the poverty line, ethnic minorities, people living in rural areas, IDPs, etc. The organization has been working for many years to provide all citizens of Georgia with access to quality reproductive health services. In addition, the Association is working in the direction of empowering young people and providing them with an environment where they can make informed choices about their bodies and health.

We see a lot of changes and progress with regard to SRHR issues in Georgia and we hope that with the help of our partners, these changes will lead to positive results.”- Koen Block, an IPPF Representative.

## BEST PRACTICE AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE: ESTONIA



Directing financial resources to the field of sexual and reproductive health, especially for young people, is not only a prerequisite for a healthy society, but also a prudent and profitable investment.

In some countries, such as Estonia, youth-friendly, well-developed services make SRHR services accessible in a safe and less stressful environment. The first youth clinic was opened in Estonia in the 1990s. In such clinics, family planning, counselling with a gynaecologist and contraception services are free.

Such clinics operate on the following principles: they help young people understand their needs, study their bodies, have access to age-appropriate information and know their rights. Due to the availability of friendly services, the number of unplanned pregnancies and therefore the demand for safe abortion services are low in Estonia. With this figure Estonia is one of the leading countries in Europe. Youth-friendly clinics have also helped reduce the number of cases sexually transmitted infections among adolescents. Counselling services provided by such clinics help to prevent the spread of such infectious diseases. In addition, infected young people have access to early and affordable treatment that can prevent future complications.